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## Paper and Cloth

Editor

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# The Cloth and Paper Issue



As you have no doubt noticed, considerable space has been devoted to the past several *Against the Grains* on the cloth and paper issue. In the November issue (page 26), **Jim Deffenbaugh** (College of William & Mary) submitted a gripe to **Rosann Bazirjian's Group Therapy** regarding the increasing price differential in cloth and hardbound editions. After surveying a year's worth of *Choice*, he often found for titles appearing in both formats "that the hardbound was priced more than three times higher than the paperback. Occasionally, but not rarely, there was a 4 to 1 or even 5 to 1 price ratio between the two." He asked for the reason for such a differential. The publisher response was written by **Ron Chrisman** (Syracuse University Press) and the vendor response by **Marcia C. Romanansky** (Blackwell North America). Ron pointed out that cloth often has shorter print runs than paper so there are fewer copies produced to recover costs. He stated that "the cost of a cloth book is approximately twice as much as the price for the paperbound book," though this can vary. He suggested that "the library has the option to buy the paper edition and reinforce it, and thus send a message to the 'offending' presses that their excessively-priced cloth editions are not being bought by their intended market" if the price differential is too wide in the library's opinion. Marcia, from the vendor's side, pointed out that the cloth and paper issue frequently surfaces in times of tight budgets. She indicated that she had studied a single

issue of *Choice* for May 1990 and that she learned that "nearly 12% of the titles were issued as [simultaneous cloth and paper editions]. The majority of the simultaneous cloth/paper titles were from university presses (57%)." Marcia shares the fact that university press publishing is trying to boost sales and many are marketing to retail bookstores and the general reader. In order to market these titles in this way, university presses are sometimes issuing paper as well as cloth. In so doing, "they still want libraries to buy the higher-priced cloth bindings." Marcia points to the problematic nature of locating a book which is available in cloth and paper, especially when such editions are not published simultaneously or by different publishers. She recommends "buying the first available issue — usually cloth — of a title when it is central to the library's collection and using subsequent paperback editions for added copies and to expand peripheral areas where cloth editions would be outside the budget."

In the February, 1993 *Against the Grain*, **Celia Wagner** (Blackwell) revisits this issue. In so doing she points out the December 9, 1992 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article by **Terence W. Moore** of Cambridge University Press, "Believe It or Not, Academic Books Are a Bargain." Celia also spoke of a discussion at a "Lively Lunch" at the 1992 Charleston Conference about the same issue. "The publishers . . . almost unanimously told the same story as Mr. Moore: cloth is where they

recoup their investment; paperbacks are a revenue loss. One said, 'It is not that cloth prices are unnaturally high. Paperback prices are unnaturally low!' and warned that if cloth sales do erode, academic paperbacks will eventually cost as much as hardbacks."

**Christian Boissonnas' ACQNET** 1.134.7 and 1.137.6-8 (December 1991) also visited this issue briefly. Because of the high cost differential between cloth and paper editions, many libraries were considering the purchase of more paperbacks. Though many libraries consider hardcover to be more durable, the increasing cost differential between cloth and paper is giving them pause. Several libraries actually have price differential limitations for purchasing paper instead of cloth (twice the cost was the most frequently used threshold for purchase of paper over cloth).

**Against the Grain will be conducting a survey relating to this issue over the next month and will hopefully report on the survey in the June issue. Publishers, vendors, and librarians will be asked to participate in the survey which will be hopefully conducted by Heather Miller at SUNY Albany. If you would like to participate, please let Katina know!**

In the meantime, we have filed a couple of interesting reports in this current issue of *ATG* regarding the rise of the mass market paperback by **Scott Stacy** (see page 27) and the evolution and growth of the 'trade' paperback by **Nat Bodian** (see page 23).☞

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